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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued February 18-21 to report on the aftermath of President Chen Shui-bian's Lunar New Year's Day proposal to abolish the National Unification Council, and the controversy sparked by a KMT advertisement Tuesday in which (for the first time) the party included Taiwan independence as a possible option for the Taiwan people to choose for their future. Coverage also focused on the U.S. arms procurements, the computer war games related to the Hankuang Exercise for 2006, and a new research report released Sunday regarding the February 28 Incident of 1947. The pro-status quo "China Times" ran an exclusive interview with an unidentified senior Bush administration official on its front page with the headline: "U.S. Official Warns Bian: [He] Will Have to Bear All the Consequences If [He Insists on] Abolishing the National Unification Council (NUC) and National Unification Guidelines (NUG)." The newspaper also spent two thirds of its second page and the entire third page running excerpts of the interview and relevant news stories on Chen's plan to abolish the NUC and NUG. Taiwan's biggest daily, the pro-independence "Liberty Times," appeared to make an effort to refute the "China Times" interview by running a banner headline on its second page February 19 that read: [Taiwan] Government Official: Abolition of NUC and NUG Is Aimed at Maintaining the Status quo [across the Taiwan Strait]".

Following the publication of the results of a "Liberty Times" survey last Thursday, both the pro-unification "United Daily News" and pro-status quo "China Times" published their own separate opinion surveys February 18 and February 20 (respectively) with regard to President Chen's Lunar New Year's Day's proposal to abolish the NUC and NUG. The "United Daily News" survey showed that 35 percent of those polled oppose Chen's proposal while 18 percent said they supported it. The "China Times" survey also showed that 32 percent of the respondents said they were against Chen's proposal while 21 percent said they supported it. The "United Daily News" also carried a news story on its page four February 19 with the headline: "To Resolve the Controversy over [Chen's Proposal] to Abolish NUC and NUG, Bian Plans to Reiterate the Four No's Pledge Without the Last `No.'"'

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, editorials of the "Liberty Times" and the two limited-circulated, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" and "Taiwan News" all criticized KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou's discourse on cross-strait relations, saying Ma is moving further away from mainstream Taiwan public opinion. An editorial in

"China Times" pointed out that along with Chen's plan to abolish NUC and NUG and the DPP's plan to present its version of the new constitution, the DPP has also worked out a timetable for an overall rescission of [Chen's] 'Five No's' pledge. A separate "China Times" commentary said Washington will no longer tolerate Chen's behavior. An editorial in the limited-circulated, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" urged Washington to directly stop Chen from abolishing the NUC and NUG; according to the paper, their abolition would mark "the beginning of Taiwan's disintegration and fall." End summary.

A) "Ma Ying-jeou Moving Further Away from Taiwan's Mainstream Public Views"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (2/20):

". The status quo of Taiwan today is that it is a nation whose sovereignty is independent outside the People's Republic of China, a fact that not even the Beijing authorities can deny. The fact that many Taiwan people, when polled, chose the option of maintaining the status quo showed that they expected to see Taiwan's sovereignty remain independent outside the PRC. On the other hand, however, it was also a choice made in the face of China's military threats [against the island]. Based on the cross-references of various opinion surveys [conducted in Taiwan], a majority of Taiwan people, if compelled to make a choice, would bravely choose the position of Taiwan being an independent sovereign state. .

"In other words, for [KMT Chairman] Ma Ying-jeou, the so-called 'maintaining the status quo' is nothing but a transitional period to the 'ultimate unification' [between Taiwan and China]. Such a position, if viewed from a long-term perspective, will definitely destroy the status quo of

Taiwan's independent sovereignty. Thus, the 'maintaining of the status quo' as repeatedly claimed by Ma is nothing but another name used to block Taiwan from becoming a normal country.

"The prior three presidential elections in Taiwan have proved that Taiwan people have absolutely despised foreign regimes. Ma, who aspires to win support of most Taiwan people but is constantly [doing things] to jeopardize the status quo Taiwan's sovereignty, is in reality moving further away from Taiwan's mainstream public views."

B) "Ma Takes a Winning Approach"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] wrote in an editorial (2/18):

". Ma's recent olive branch to pan-green-camp supporters in the form of a 'Liberty Times' advertisement on Wednesday marked a turning point: The ad's concession to entrenched support for self-determination and its dismissal of coercion as a tool for unification will likely turn out to be one of the most important local political developments in recent years. . Taiwanese can be expected to back Ma for the next presidency if he continues with this approach. It may yet turn out to be the biggest gift Taiwan could hope for. .

"Let us assume for the moment that Ma is elected president - and that his apparent goodwill to the pan-green voter is sincere. If his stint in office is successful, his KMT successor will need to emulate him and defend Taiwanese self-determination. Otherwise, a humbled and reconfigured DPP will probably replace him, either in four years or eight. Any of these options would surely make supporters of Taiwanese self-determination of all colors shiver with pleasure."

C) "Ma's Future Choice Between Realism and Opportunism"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] said in an editorial (2/20):

". From the perspective of Taiwan's democratic consolidation, for a century-old KMT to respect Taiwan's people's right to decide its own fate and its future relationship with China is a great leap forward compared to its long-time habit of imposing its pro-unification doctrine on our people with scant regard for the will of the public. However, whether or not Ma is sincere in respecting the freedom of choice of local citizens remains in doubt. .

"As maintaining the status quo of Taiwan as an independent and democratic country has become the mainstream value in Taiwan, it is understandable that Ma would test the water by tossing out a concept that would, at least on the surface, seem to respect local citizen's right of free choice. But is Ma doing these really for the national interests of Taiwan? Can he encounter successfully the hard-core pro-unification forces from the pan-blue camp, including the old-guard led by Lien Chan? Or is Ma simply an opportunist politician who only has his eyes on stealing away DPP voters? . If Ma wishes to show his qualifications to be president, he should lead the KMT to respect this mainstream democratic principle."

D) "We Can Do Nothing But Simply Watch Taiwan Bear the Consequences"

The pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (2/20):

"It looks like President Chen and the DPP are really ready to have a clash with his 'Five No's' pledge! Despite the overwhelming pressure from Washington, Chen seems completely unwavering. Presidential Office Secretary-General Mark Chen has made it very clear that President Chen 'hopes' that the proposal to abolish the National Unification Council and National Unification Guidelines 'would be clearly dealt with by the end of February.' .

"On the other hand, the DPP is taking the advantage of this opportunity to present its version of Taiwan's new constitution. The DPP also made it very clear that it will set no restrictions on any issues [concerning the new constitution], namely, [it will touch on issues] including [Taiwan's] national flag, national title and its territory. If the 'proposal to abolish National Unification Council and National Unification Guidelines' directly scraps the last 'No' in Chen 'Five No's' pledge, the [DPP's] planned new constitution which will touch on [Taiwan's] territory and national title will be a direct move to tear down the remaining 'Four No's'. Even though the DPP's version of Taiwan's new constitution will not come out until June, it seems that it has already had a 'conclusion;' after all, how would it be called the DPP's 'new constitution' if it fails to talk about [Taiwan's] territory and national title? In other words, [it is evident that the DPP] already worked out a timetable for overall rescission of [Chen's] 'Five No's' pledge. .

"The core issue is actually very clear; namely, it has never been a logical question as to 'who is changing the status quo across the Taiwan Strait' but a question of 'who is defining the status quo'. And there is already an answer to the question. The United States has said very clearly earlier that it is Uncle Sam, not Beijing or Taipei, who is in the lead of defining the cross-Strait status quo. This is the reason why President Chen said last year that 'there is no way that [he] can succeed in pushing for' Taiwan independence and writing a new constitution.

"By the same token, perhaps the impact created by Chen's insistence on 'abolishing the National Unification Council' will not be the highlighting of whether Beijing has unilaterally altered the status quo but the fact that Chen has attempted to snatch the 'right to define [the cross-Strait status quo].' . While the United States is extremely

busy in handling [problems] in Iraq, Iran and North Korea, will it be very polite to Taiwan, which came out trying to grasp the right to define the `cross-Straits status quo'? ."

E) "The United States Remains Firm and Resolute; What Will Be A-Bian's Next Step?"

Washington correspondent Norman Fu said in the "Washington Outlook" column of the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (2/18):

". It is not difficult to tell from the words of the U.S. official interviewed [by this journalist] that the United States has reached the last critical moment that it will no longer tolerate or appease A-bian. Washington's strategy [toward Chen] is thinly veiled toughness, mild and severe at the same time. The mild part is that Washington did not forget to show friendship and goodwill to Taiwan. But the severe part is that when it comes to policy, Washington offers absolutely no room for negotiation, because if it yields again, it will jeopardize the U.S. interests, a development that Washington can by no means accept. As a result, A-bian will have to make his policy match that of the United States and adopt measures to mend the rifts and gaps between his and the U.S. policies. ."

F) "Can U.S. Rein in Chen?"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] said in an editorial (2/21):

"President Chen Shui-bian appears determined to go ahead with his plan to scrap the dormant 1991 National Unification Council despite repeated U.S. warnings against it. His administration and the ruling DPP are trying everything to justify Chen's move, which is an outright breach of trust of the people and the U.S. Washington is upset for being entangled in such an unexpected, annoying and unnecessary spin with a protg, when crisis in Iraq, Iran, North Korea and the Middle East demand its full attention. The U.S. deserves this, as it has left Taiwan's pro-independence leader and his supporters believe there is room for them to fool around.

"No wonder separatism has been on the rise in recent years; and the possibility of a cross-strait war has drastically increased. U.S. ambiguity on ideas of unification and independence is the main culprit. The two conflicting options were put forward by the Chen-DPP government after it assumed power in 2000. .

"The U.S.-defined status quo, a compromise for peace between Washington and Beijing, does not allow Taiwan's separation
n
from China or reunification with the mainland by force. Taiwan's people have accepted it. Chen's latest plan to scrap the last `No' in his `Five Nos' pledge is but a gambit for domestic consumption to rescue his crumbling authority. Nip his ploy forthrightly and stop it from becoming a mockery of the U.S. and the beginning of Taiwan's disintegration and fall. Only the U.S. can do this."

KEEGAN